

More on SUPERVISION

By Jonathan Brown, Acting Editor

In *News and Views* Summer 2002 I argued, 'We need to plagiarise the counselling model [of supervision] to introduce the concept of a legitimised and peer practitioner as our supervisor'.

As noted in the last *News and Views* this created interest. This issue has two contributions to this debate.

The first is a review by **Rosemary Jolley** of a recent collection of papers on supervision in a number of adjacent professions which asks which of the several models should be adopted to meet the needs of personal advisers in the Connexions

Service. Rosemary ends her review by asking a series of pertinent questions and exits with a plea for comments from readers: *Let us know your experience of supervision and support. Can you give us any examples of good practice? What models have you tried? Which of them do you think has worked?*

The second contribution on supervision is a shortened report on a research project conducted among HE Careers Advisers by **Sheila Trahar**.

Her starting point is that supervision is a requirement for counsellors and

therapists practising in the UK, for other helping professionals including social workers and psychologists but is not considered to be a necessity for careers practitioners in HE.

(Nor is it for adult guidance workers.) But why not? Sheila finds that in HE Careers Services 'the support needs are many and varied and largely unmet'. This sounds familiar to those working in adult guidance more generally. I do hope these two readable papers help to stimulate further thoughts and suggestions on the supervision issue.

What Sort of Supervision?

Supporting personal advisors in Connexions: Perspectives on supervision and mentoring from allied professions

Editor: Andrew Edwards

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Reviewed by Rosemary Jolley

(Rosemary is NAEGA Treasurer and an independent consultant and trainer in guidance; she is also a trained counsellor and supervisor.)

Those who know me well, particularly NVQ candidates, will be well aware that I consider supervision to be essential to the delivery of quality guidance; and of course this view is represented in the NVQ Occupational standards for guidance workers and both the previous Guidance Council Standards for Learning & Work and the new *matrix* standard.

The NVQ expects workers to seek feedback; produce a development plan related to their work; establish mutual support networks; and ensure their practice is accountable to relevant key personnel. The Guidance Council standards have required that staff are appropriately supported and supervised.

I think we can agree that supervision for guidance workers is recognised good practice – but what do we mean by supervision? How many guidance workers really do feel that they receive support and supervision on a regular basis and how much does the supervision contribute to improving practice and maintaining workers' well being?



Supporting personal advisors in Connexions: Perspectives on supervision and mentoring from allied professions is an occasional paper that was published in the autumn of 2001. It is the first occasional paper published by the Centre for Careers and Personal Development (CCPD). The centre was created in August 2000 as a result of the merger between the College of Guidance Studies (COGS) and Canterbury Christ Church University College. The paper is the result of two seminars which brought together practitioners from a number of different occupational sectors. Each of the contributors has presented a paper which identifies and explores the usual methods used to provide supervision to workers.

The sectors represented are: social work, school mentoring, youth work, counselling and the present personal advisor role.

Andrew Edwards provides a useful overview of all types of supervision discussed in the paper, and picks out the key issues to be resolved before developing a supervision framework for personal advisers. He offers some useful tables to show how difficult it is to compare the different approaches and models presently in use.

Tony Watts has written a foreword which emphasises the value of identifying and exploring the supervision options and which puts the problem clearly into context. Whilst *'the new Connexions Service is still at an early stage of development,'* he states, *'many personal advisors found themselves deeply engaged in, at times, disturbing, and even dangerous relationships with young people and their families... the boundaries within which the personal adviser were operating were not clear'*. Watts gives examples of the different systems and stresses that personal advisers have to cope with and recognises that 'the strains of coping with these demands would result in regular conflicts, unanticipated crises and premature burnout'. Supervision has a very important part to play in avoiding the build up of stress and anxiety in the new role.

From the range of occupational sectors we can study a number of different ways of delivering supervision. The different models presented show that it is really very difficult to decide on one ideal system for personal advisers.

Some of the questions that we have to address are:

- ▀ **Should it be the Line Manager who provides the supervision?** Where this does happen then often supervision ends up linked with performance review and appraisal schemes and may even also link to an individual's career development. Usually in this sort of set up decisions are recorded and kept on file. Clearly there can be a tension between the manager's role to 'get the work done' and the need to oversee the growth of an individual worker. Even where a manager does succeed in maintaining the values of the supervisory process, will the worker feel confident to expose their weaknesses to someone in a position of power?
- ▀ **Should supervision be in groups or on an individual basis?** Group supervision offers advisers the opportunity to learn from and supervise each other. Common areas of difficulty can be identified and worked on. Where people come from different training backgrounds group supervision offers an excellent chance to share expertise and alternative models, as long as a clearly understood way of working together is established at the start.
- ▀ **What function is supervision aiming to fulfil?** In counselling work the supervisor can be said to have three roles: to manage the supervision process; to counsel and to teach the supervisee. Supervision can be said to have three main functions: normative (to induct into the standards and culture of the profession); formative (to develop skills, understanding and capacities); and restorative (to address the tensions of the work and 'enable the continuation of work for the best interests of the client without succumbing to burnout'). This can be seen in the broader terms of: monitoring, educational and supportive functions. One approach to supervision used in social work is the Solution Focused model. This model is aimed at working with people to find solutions and achieve goals as swiftly as possible. It places the emphasis on the outcomes not the problems. Supervisees are asked to identify times when the problem is not present or is different. The focus is on changing the future and looking at what needs to be changed in order for the 'desired future' to be attained.

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- ▶ **Who should be a mentor?** Mentoring is seen (particularly in the educational sector) as making a very valuable contribution to professional development. One paper gives a very detailed history of mentoring and how it is used today. A number of relevant questions are posed, including: how high in the hierarchy should mentoring go? Is it only for those 'at the start'? Should there be different mentors at different levels of professional development?
- ▶ **Is there a common understanding of what mentoring is among participants?** Many of the present personal advisers come from sectors with different attitudes to supervision and are used to operating within a specific framework for support. It is a major challenge to produce a framework for supervision that fits the needs of workers from very different training and work experience and which puts the interests of the client at the centre of the process.

The papers in this publication offer detailed and well-argued reasons for supporting particular approaches. There is a wealth of expertise to be drawn upon. Connexions services need to decide whether individual or group supervision is the best mode. What theory of problem solving should underpin the supervision approach? Have the supervisors and supervisees a clear and agreed understanding of the functions of the supervision? Who is going to have supervision? Who supports the managers? And do we really think that managers are the best equipped to carry out the supervision?

What is clear is that supervision cannot be carried out by untrained supervisors; everyone needs to be clear of the objectives of the supervision and the ethical practices that underpin it.

At the end of this occasional paper Edwards emphasises the importance of clear professional boundaries and working practices. He states:

'If support structures are going to be embedded within the organisational structure and culture, personal advisers may expect to know what form(s) of supervision or mentoring this entitles them to. The level of entitlement might usefully be framed within an organisational policy or job description or both! ... particular attention therefore needs

to be given to framing job descriptions – since these should make clear for practitioners where the boundaries of their responsibilities lie.'

Whichever supervision and support framework is adopted, supervisors need to:

- ▶ be well trained
- ▶ know which theories and models of supervision inform their practice
- ▶ identify and agree the functions of the supervision
- ▶ decide on the type of supervision which best suits what they want to achieve, e.g. individual or group
- ▶ be supervised too
- ▶ be accountable to both supervisees and clients.

What good practice already exists in guidance work that can be passed on to the new personal advisers as they move towards getting to grips with their new role? Most guidance workers talk about receiving appraisal once or twice a year, maybe this does offer more than performance review and looks at training and development needs too. But how many guidance workers have a structured opportunity to 'offload', raise uncertainties, check out actions they have taken? If they do, who is the listener, the facilitator? A trained supervisor with clear understanding about boundaries and what the supervisor's role should be? Or is it a hard-pressed line manager who may not be receptive to hearing that the individual or the service is having difficulties. Does the worker see the 'review' as something they want to get through and 'pass with good marks' because it is so hierarchical in the way it has been set up?

What are your experiences as a guidance worker? We talk about congruence with clients – can you be congruent about your work with colleagues, managers and/or supervisors?

Let us know your experience of supervision and support. Can you give us any examples of good practice? What models have you tried? Which of them do you think have worked?

Please reply to Rosemary, at News and Views, admin@naega.org.uk